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# See as One

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# See as One

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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엄마, 아빠. 제가 하고 싶은 것 마음껏 할 수 있었던 것은 엄마 아빠가 믿어주고 곁을 지켜 주셨기에 가능한 일이었습니다. 감사하고 사랑하고 건강하세요.

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# **Abstract**

See as One

By Min Haeng Kang

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2020

Major Director: Jack Wax, Professor,  
Department of Craft and Material Studies

Everything that exists in the world is made from “nature.” Humans who initially coexisted with nature began to distinguish themselves from what is human and what is not. Unlike past systems that used to reuse all materials, Society so far has focused on maximizing economic profits along with advancing technology. As a result, the nature of the earth is being irrevocably destroyed, and I think the basis for this lies in the distinctions made between the human and the non-human.

I am always seeking to be in a state where I do not have an atman, like the Buddhist concept of speaking of oneself in utter nothingness. Sunyata, in Buddhist philosophy, the emptiness that constitutes the true and the ultimate reality. Sunyata is seen not as a negation of existence, but rather as the undifferentiation out of which all apparent entities, distinctions, and dualities arise. My understanding of The Buddhist sunyata concept that ultimately understands oneself as an empty being has led me to the notion that all beings in the world are one without distinction from myself.

New Materialism can offer opportunities for expanded interpretations of materials and objects, and their relationships with all that surrounds them. We can move away from a human-centric ontology. Working within the concept of the new materialism, I work with discarded objects and materials as my collaborators, and think of them as living beings with complex inner lives. I hope to blur the distinctions between life and non-life, and change the dominant cultural attitudes regarding human consumption.

# Introduction

Why is it taken for granted that humans are entitled to indiscriminately consume limited natural resources? The nature of the earth is being irrevocably destroyed, and I think the basis for this lies in the distinctions made between the human and the non-human. This might be expressed by looking at the idea of a shell. A shell based on the premise of Sunyata, a Buddhist philosophy. In this philosophical stance the empty that constitutes the ultimate reality may be empty of a self, yet it may be seen as full of everything else. I think there is an urgent need for a shift away from ideologies that allow for the reckless consumption of non-human beings, and of inanimate matter. I work with discarded objects and materials as my collaborators, and think of them as living beings with complex inner lives. I hope to blur the distinctions between life and non-life, and change the dominant cultural attitudes regarding human consumption.

The processes that I employ in my work perhaps can shed a bit of light on what is an essential self. I began my graduate studies attempting to find ways to positively influence this culture that fosters abuse of the natural world. I have tried to create a place and time to focus on the cause of the environmental problems facing us. The present era in human-centered thinking must learn to think anew of nature's value. By repurposing abandoned materials, and treating them as living things, I have tried to redefine the relationship people have had with what they categorize as the "raw materials around them." Working within the concept of the new materialism, I would like to explore work that can work to redefine the relationship between matter and non-matter. This can allow me to think of my very existence as that of being in a non-material state, rather than as a state of matter.

# Background

## Philosophy

I think that making work is a process of understanding myself and expanding my understanding of the larger implications of human existence. As a teenager when I first began to recognize my ego, I drew a self-portrait of my exterior appearance while I lay crumpled like clothes upon the floor, I included a small butterfly flying above me. The butterfly was what I aspired to become.

At that time, I began to be more self - conscious, and I was distressed thinking about many other people's perceptions of me. I couldn't ignore the environment in which I had been born, and still live comfortably as a human being. This gave me a great and heavy load; it gave me the feeling of being weighed down by the gravitas of it all. I never thought I could find a way out of this abyss. I thought that it was the burden that I had to carry, and the only way out was out of this life. I believe strongly in the Buddhist idea of reincarnation, by which I mean after death the non-physical essence of a living being starts a new life in a different body. I've always wanted to be born as an Inuit in my next life, as I thought they are the people living closest to the natural world. The life I was living was not based upon my own value system, and I wanted to escape the routines dictated by society at large. I found myself again and again, each morning, opening my eyes to eat, to sleep, and to meet others expectations of what was demanded of me in school and in work. I longed for a life and environment where I could live in the present with perfect uninterrupted concentration, instead of always with the demand to plan for the future.

I never experienced the extreme change that I had dreamt of by going to Alaska, but I did get the opportunity to leave my birthplace in Korea, and expose myself to the new environment of

Japan. Due to our geographical proximity, and a long history of both hostile and friendly relations, Japan and Korea have many social and cultural similarities. The similarities allowed me to understand the subtle differences in the way the environment affected my thoughts and my feelings. According to Shad Helmstetter, Ph.D., people have an average of 60,000 thoughts in 20 hours. This breaks down to 2,500 thoughts per hour and 42 thoughts every minute.<sup>1</sup> Of all those ideas, how many am I actually aware of? And is it right that I define my existence by my small set of 60,000 thoughts and ideas? These questions led me to think that I shouldn't define myself by my thoughts alone. When I felt something that was beyond my ability to reason, I began to question if what I thought was truly my own.

I began to realize the degree to which my thoughts, my emotions, and my self-image were the products of my environment. I find that I can lighten myself by letting go of the attachments that I have to my own musings. This doesn't mean that I must deny them, but by choosing not to become obsessed by them, and allowing them to change of their own volition I have lessened the struggle. My thoughts and emotions come and go constantly...all of the time, though some remain or return more frequently than others. There is this "constant presence" -- that which recognizes thoughts that return -- it is something that can be defined as "myself." I can be free of the burden of other people's expectations by focusing on the present, and the present alone, and by noticing changes in my thoughts and my emotions. I found that I didn't need to make a dramatic shift to living in the wilderness of Alaska.

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<sup>1</sup> Shad Helmstetter, Ph.D., *What to Say When You Talk to Your Self*, 1982.



## **Practice**

### **As a Person**

My parents' Buddhist culture and ideas have been strong influences on me since childhood. I didn't perceive Buddhism as a religious ideology, it was part of the living environment I was born into. Before I came to graduate school, I lived in a temple for three months, and underwent extensive meditation training. The monk's only lesson was to sit and notice what I thought and felt. Looking at one's essence is a practical exercise that confirmed my realization that one cannot define oneself by one's thoughts and feelings, and that any true concept of the self is separate from them. To notice is not to blindly follow my own thoughts as I tend to do, wandering between past future, heaven, and earth, but to remain present and identify my thoughts and emotions as they happen to me, and recognize myself in that moment. At first, I couldn't understand the meaning when a monk told me to "Just look at yourself". How could I just look at myself when the pain in my legs feels like a ton of iron pressing on them? When I sat for a long time without moving? The moment I realized there was nothing more than air pressing me down, even excruciating pain melted away like snow on a hot pot. The pain I felt was a result of my own thoughts, and I realized that noticing is a practice of separating myself from my emotions and physical sensations. The pain in my legs was necessary for me to realize that these emotions and physical sensations trapped my essence inside my body. Meditating eight to eleven hours a day from dawn to late into the night, I began to feel the reverberations of a door closing in another part of the temple and movements of others in space. By becoming attuned to the sensations of sound waves in my body, I realized that I could no longer think of my body as material, and sound as non-material. Instead I realized the distinction between material and non-material is a product of language.

## As an Artist

I expressed myself as the 껍질 (kkeobjil), an empty structure with many holes, to declare that I could not contain my own thoughts and feelings inside any longer. I don't think the state of the 껍질 (kkeobjil) is my ultimate of self, what I do think of as a 껍질 (kkeobjil) is my present state. I still have a sort of "statue of myself". I am always seeking to be in a state where I do not have an atman, the concept of the ego as real, like the Buddhist concept of speaking of oneself in utter nothingness. Sunyata, in Buddhist philosophy, the emptiness that constitutes the true and the ultimate reality. Sunyata is seen not as a negation of existence, but rather as the undifferentiation out of which all apparent entities, distinctions, and dualities arise.<sup>2</sup> Buddha advised to not accept his words on blind faith, but to decide for ourselves whether his teachings are right or wrong, then ought we follow them. My understanding of The Buddhist sunyata concept that ultimately understands oneself as an empty being has led me to the notion that all beings in the world are one without distinction from myself.

The abstract understanding that everyone is one, makes it a little easier to comprehend that through the continuous cycling and recycling of all things real differentiation disappears. It is understandable that everything in the world shares a little part of the other, as the incense had changed with the ash, material conditions have changed, but the smoke has spread back into the air and become part of myself again. When I came to believe that there was no difference between you and I, then the meaning of everyone being the same could be applied not only to humans, but to all beings in the natural and in the animal worlds.

When I began to broaden my understanding of myself as a social being, I wanted to consider more deeply what is the role of an artist in society is today. The conscious intentions that my own

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<sup>2</sup> Gloria Latha, "sunyata", Buddhist concept, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/sunyata>

work and creative activities could undertake as possibly having social impacts, and the ramifications beyond the gallery setting, became something that I was considered more and more.

Feeling that too much material already exists in the world, a world that is only focused on creating more new things, I began working exclusively with only discarded materials. Materials such as plastic-bags, chewing gum, paper towels, and any other detritus that I'd come upon. I worked with the hope that my creative actions could make one more cognizant of a cycle, not just the as usual continuous one-sided consumption of the earth's resources.

Since I began studying in graduate school at VCUarts, I've initiated the making of various works out of a multiplicity of trash materials. The scale of the work is as diverse as the forms of trash I have found; from the smallest of small objects I can hold in one hand, to installations that occupy entire rooms.

Unlike the materials that can decompose back into natural elements, paper and metals, plastics and rubbers remained in a solid state for an eternity. I began to use plastic mainly because I thought the power of art to turn "meaningless materials into meaningful things" could reduce the waste released into the world in some way.

My work *Untitled (2018)*, was made in reference to Do-ho Suh's ethereal fabric sculptures. By expressing the hardness of architectural shape and the lightness of the material in his sculpture, he materializes impressive and affective representations of the non-material idea of memory of home. By creating empty forms imitating icebergs and rocks out of transparent plastic vinyl, I expressed contrasting visual languages all embodied in one object.



Figure 35. *Untitled*, plastic vinyl, h1.5 x w13.5 x d12 inches, 2018



Figure 36. *Do-Ho Suh*

*Hub, 260-10 Sungbook-dong, Sungbook-ku, Seoul, Korea,*

In addition to rocks and icebergs, I also became quite interested in the shapes and the histories of other organic materials. Barnacles are thought to be one of the oldest surviving creatures on the planet, they are believed to date back millions of years. Although they will have gone through many adaptations, the barnacle is thought to have changed very little over that time. Despite the rising levels of pollution and changes in the water, barnacles are one of the few animals that have not been greatly affected. For *Untitled* (2019), I expressed the idea that plastic spreads throughout the world and remains unchanged by manipulating pieces of plastic waste to mimic a barnacle's form.



Figure 37. *Untitled*, h6.7 x W3.9 x D6.7 inches, Plastic package from food, found object, 2019

For *Barnacle* (2018), I presented the form of a barnacle as a fashionable accessory to show the contrast between a body with a finite life and plastic that feels almost infinite compared to a human. Adornment and desire are closely interconnected. I want to use my power to

transform materials that are regularly discarded into something that is so desirable that people would place it on their own bodies.



Figure 38. **Barnacle**, Plastic Package from food, h1.6 x w5 x d7.8 inches, 2018

It occurred to me that our society's systems were focused only on the fastest modes of production, and that the responsibility for generating more garbage has been passed on to the individuals who often indiscreetly discard it. For *Record* (2019), I made a complex fabric form using only this plastic waste, waste which was generated while purchasing my daily necessities such as bread, potatoes and toilet paper. I wanted to do a bit of intervention to showcase one individual's attempt to fight against a mechanized system that is devouring everything in its path.





Figure 39. *Record*, plastic bags, thread, h33 x w42.2 inches, 2019

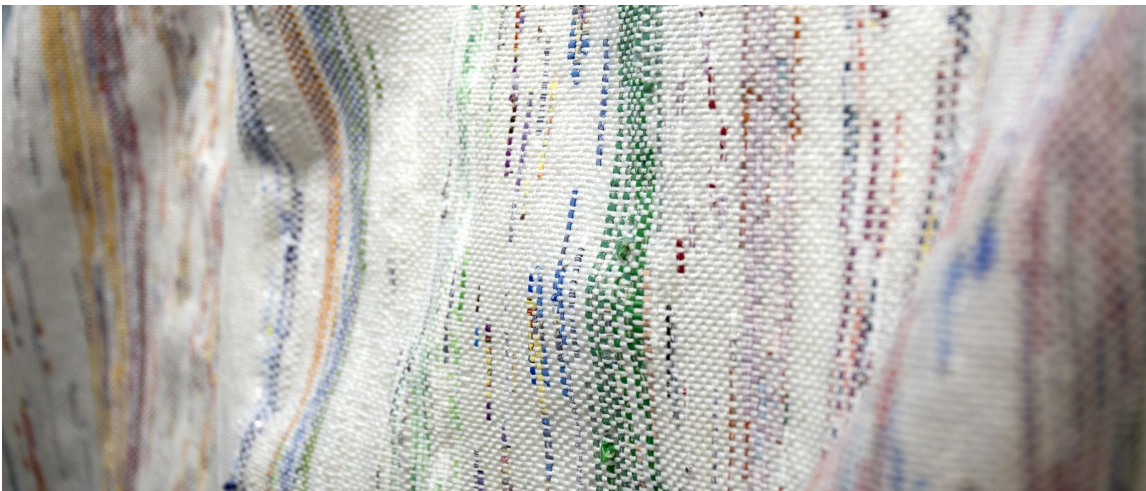


Figure 40. Detail image of *Record*

In the beginning, I felt that the limitations of the plastic materials that I gave myself permission to use worked against some of my intentions, in that it shut me off from having quite an expansive creative range. By limiting the types of “garbage” that I was using I was definitely limiting what I could “say.”

In contrast to the long process of manufacturing paper towels out of wood, it only takes 2-3 seconds for them to be used to dry one’s hands and become “garbage.” For *Circulation* (2019), I collected used paper towels and shaped them into forms imitating pollen to highlight their mutability and reconnect them with their biological origins.

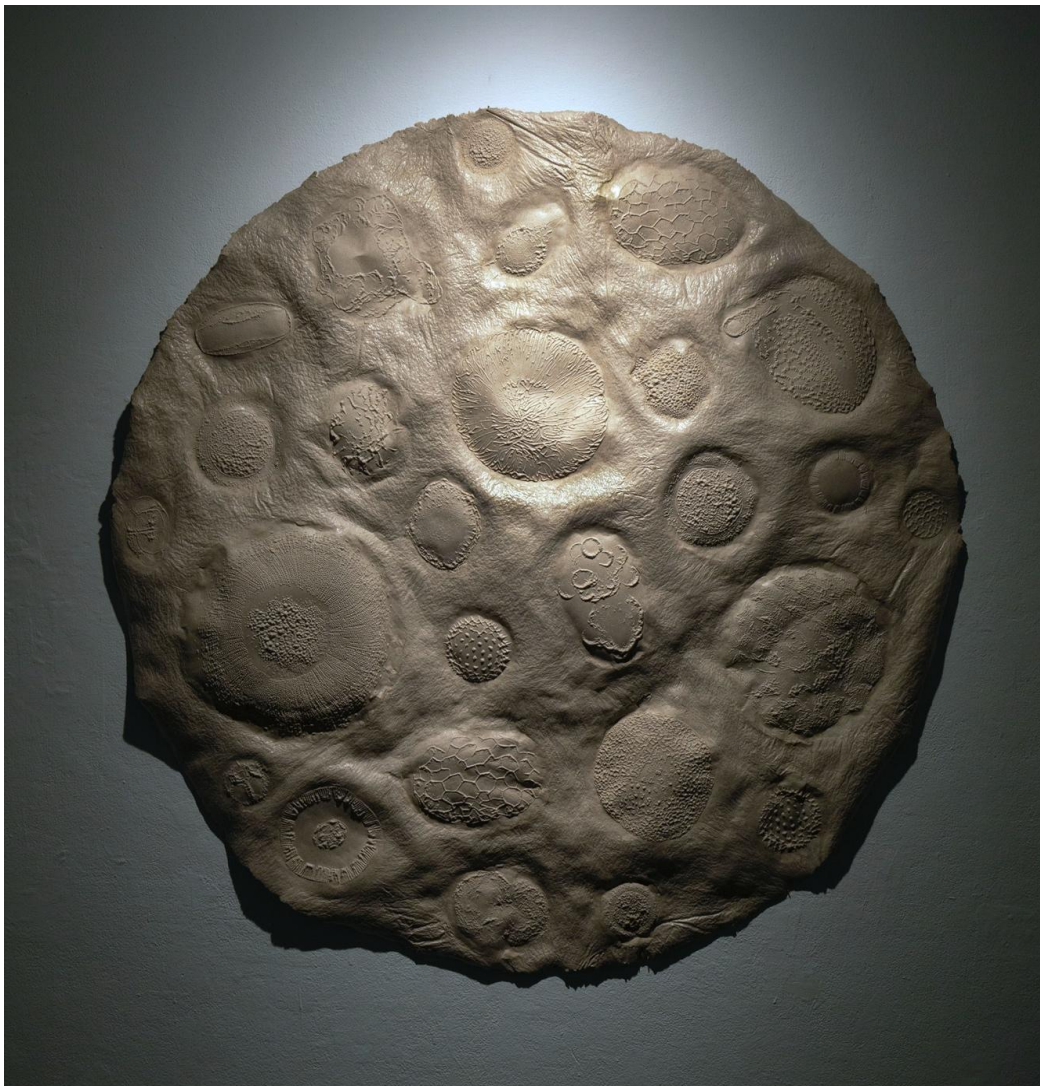


Figure 41. *Circulation*, paper towel, Diam.59 x d4 inches, 2019





*Figure 42. Detail image of **Circulation***

For *Playing* (2019), a series of small sculptures created from chewing gum and small found objects, I worked to capture the “fragments” of life, a life that I had mindlessly chewed and discarded. These pieces began from very spontaneous ideations of playing. I cultivated the development of “improvisational ideas,” ideas that came to mind un-self-consciously, similar to the way one chews gum, without thinking about chewing! The making of the work, being likened to the energy one expounds in chewing behavior, actually utilizes a very sophisticated process.

There is a strong similarity to B. Wurtz's ongoing *Untitled* (2000-present) series, which utilizes similar discarded materials, and emphasizes the power of humor and play.



*Figure 43. **Playing***  
*electric code from vacuum cleaner, chewing gum,*  
*silica gel from products, h2.3 x w 4.3 x d1.5 inches, 2019*



*Figure 44. B. Wurtz's work **Untitled***  
*wood, thread, plastic mesh bags, h44.5 x w24 x d10 inches, 2013*

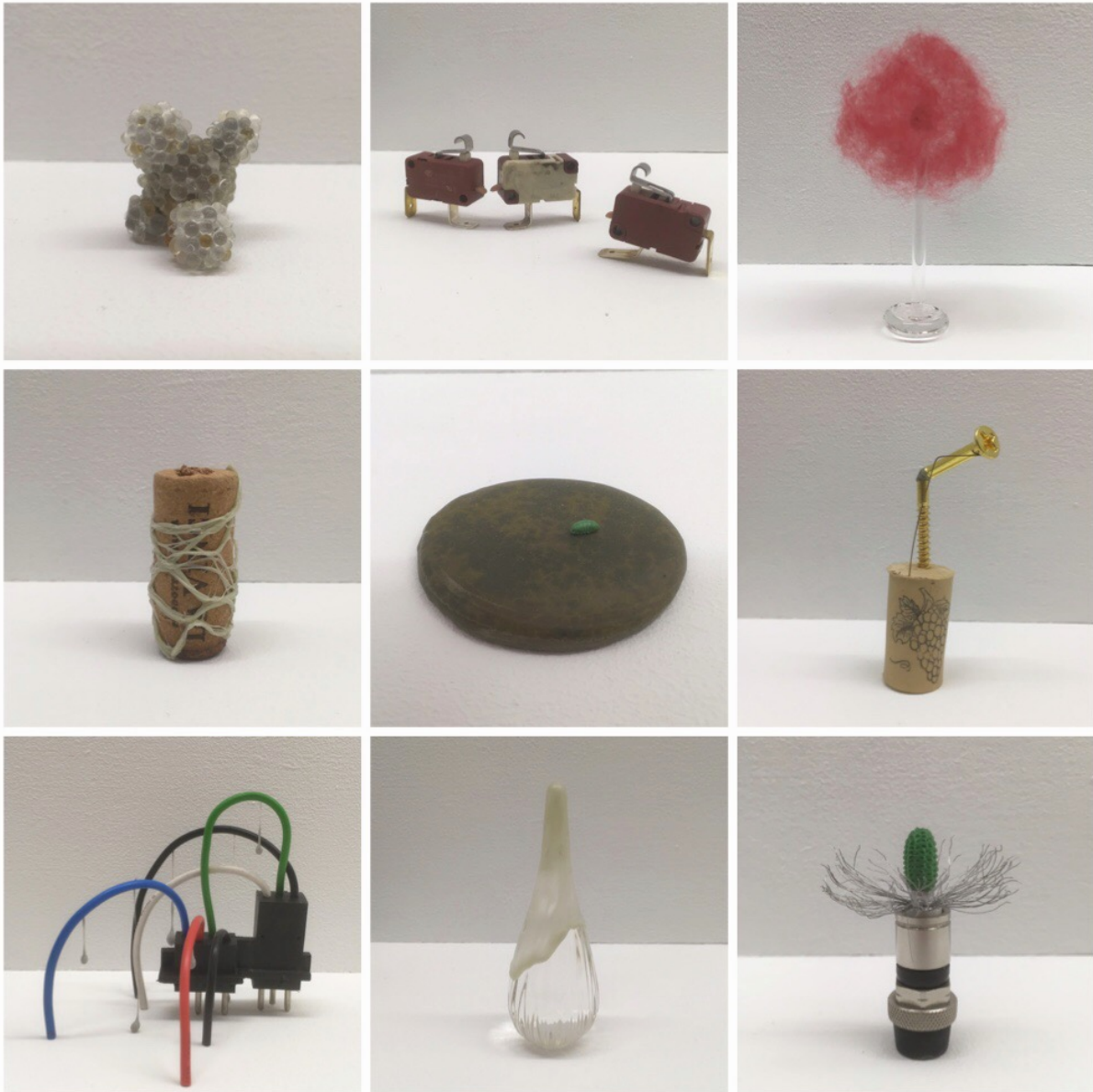


Figure 45. *Playing*, discarded material with chewing gum, various size, 2019





Figure 46. *Playing*, discarded material with chewing gum, various size, 2019



Figure 47. *Playing*, discarded material with chewing gum, various size, 2019



Figure 48. **Playing**, discarded metal, chewing gum, h1 x w1.5 x d 0.78 inches, 2019



For *Drawing in Space1* (2020), I attempted to draw into space using the lines produced by a very fine metal saw blade. I utilized chewing gum to build the form in the interior space. I as well considered the shadows created by the nails as a line drawn in space. The difficulty of distinguishing between the saw blade and saw blade's shadow blurred the distinction between the objects and the non-objects that we perceive.



Figure 49. *Drawing in a space1*, broken metal saw, chewing gum, h8.2 x w 9.1 x d 7.2ft, 2020

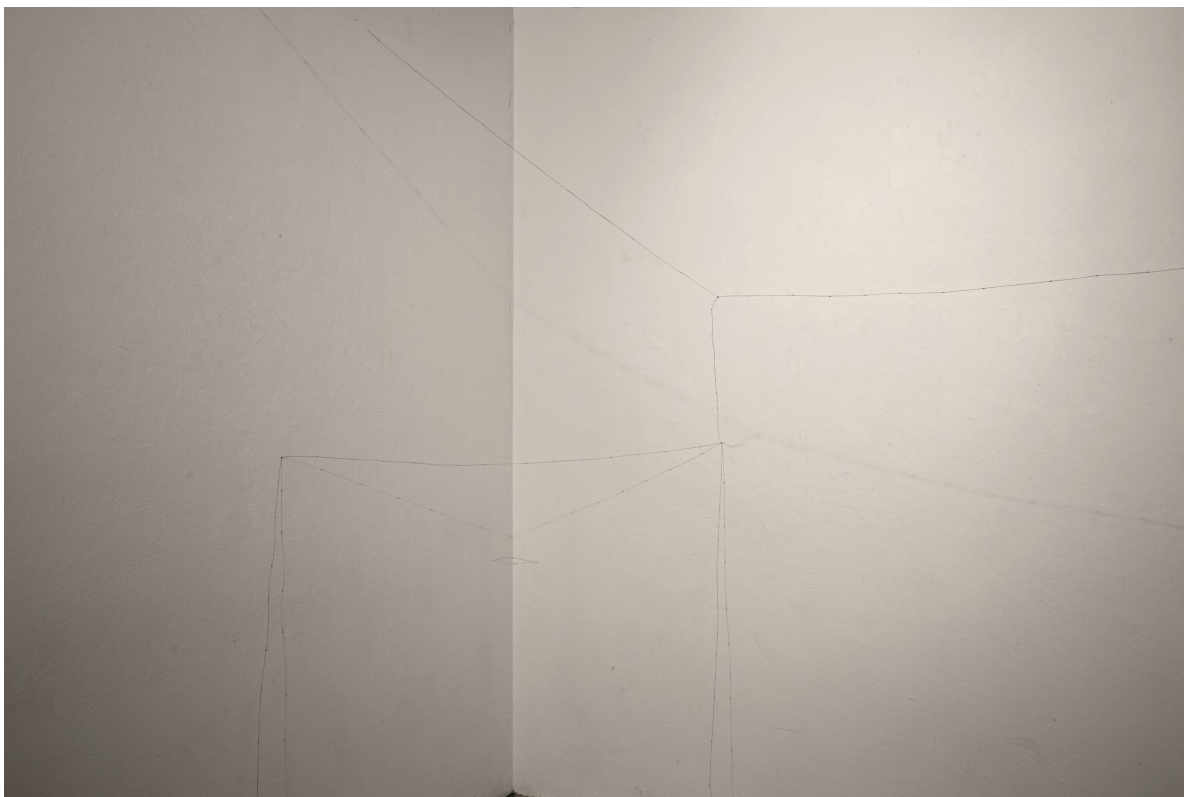


Figure 50. Detail image of ***Drawing in a space1***, broken metal saw, chewing gum, h8.2 x w 9.1 x d 7.2ft, 2020



Figure 51. Detail image of ***Drawing in a space1***



For *Drawing in a space2* (2020), I wanted to expand our perception of the space, a space usually limited by the walls surrounding us. By creating an illusion that the curved line seemed to come out directly through the wall, I create the possibility that the wall has become diaphanous.

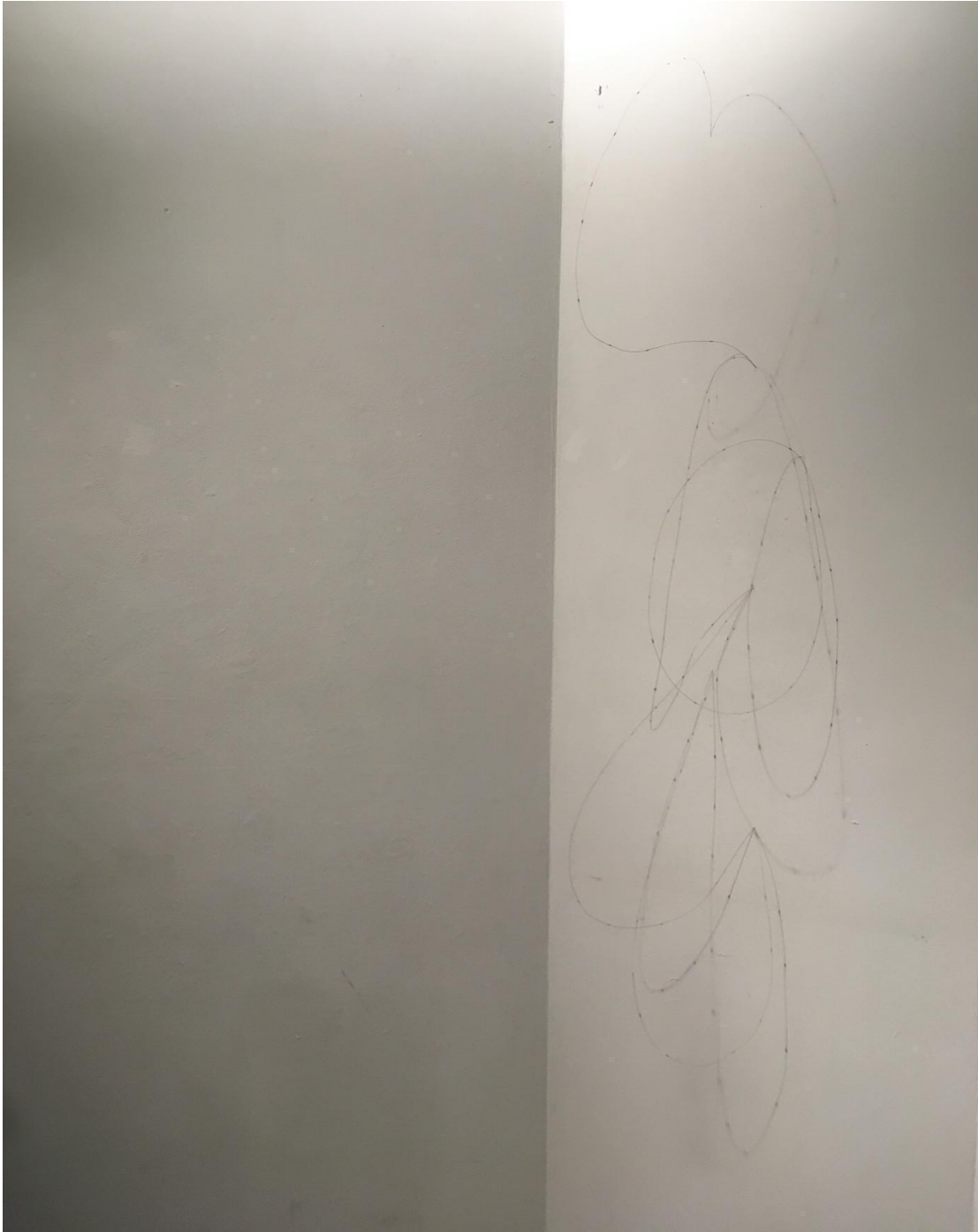


Figure 52. *Drawing in a space2*, broken metal saw, chewing gum, h43 x w13.7 x d7.8 inches, 2020

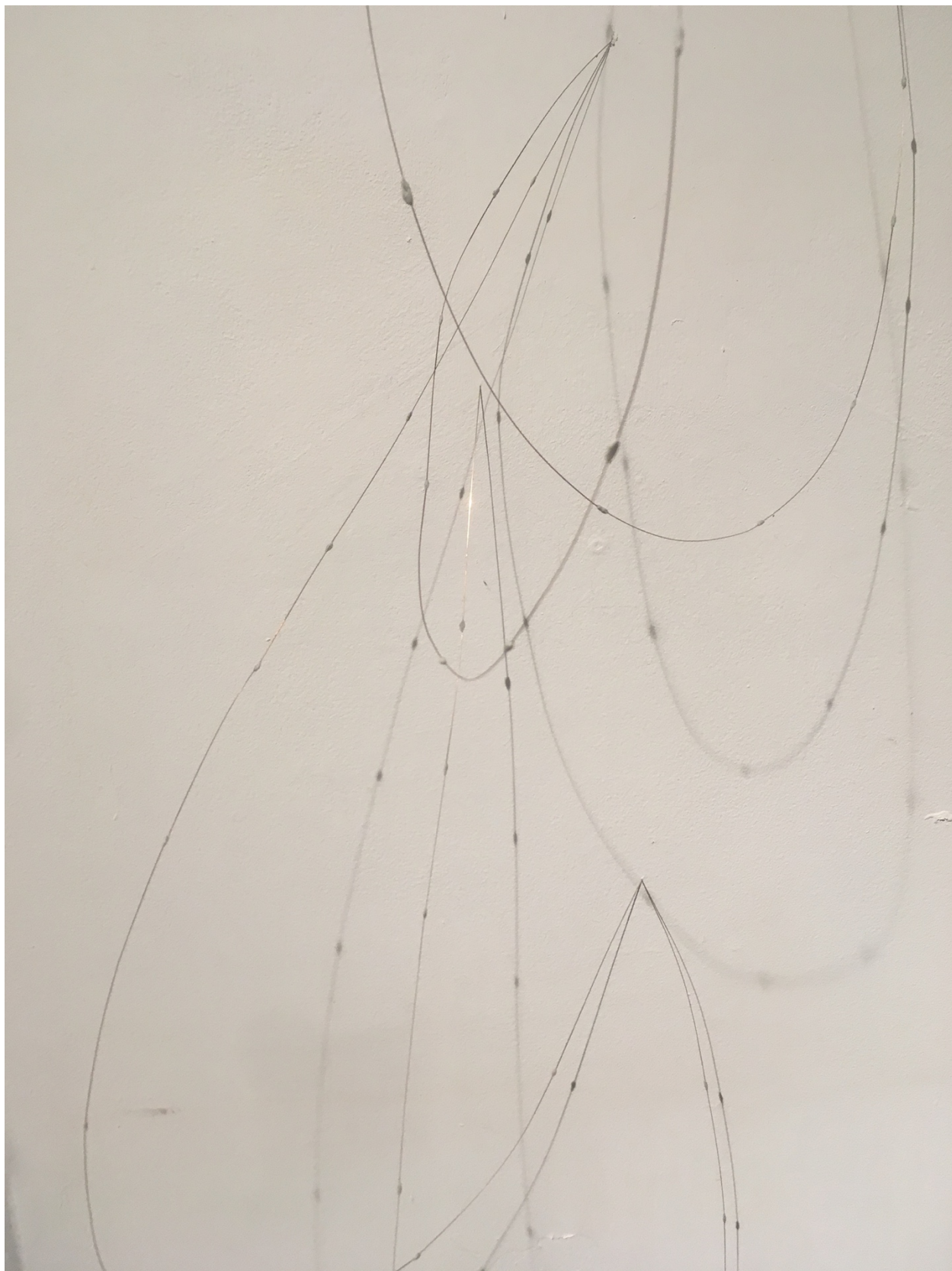


Figure 53. Detail image of *Drawing in a space2*

In my work there are multiple analogous concerns with Gertrud Louise Goldschmidt, a modern visual artist known as Gego. Gego is known for her geometric and kinetic sculptures made in the 1960s and 1970s, which she described as "drawings without paper". Gego created pieces made of thin metal, such as wire, and installed what seemed to be images that were drawn in space. She utilized shadow making as a methodology to draw with. Gego was allowed to play with the idea of the stable and unstable elements of art. The stable elements of art are the sculpture itself, while the unstable elements consist of the constantly changing shadows, and the slight movements in her work, due to the extreme fragility of her materials.<sup>3</sup> My work also worked with the very same idea of drawing in space using both the materials themselves, along with what I've categorized as non-materials, the shadows. While the space she addresses remains a visually defined space, I'm attempting to include the space beyond the walls by installing the lines as if they are penetrating into and out of the walls.



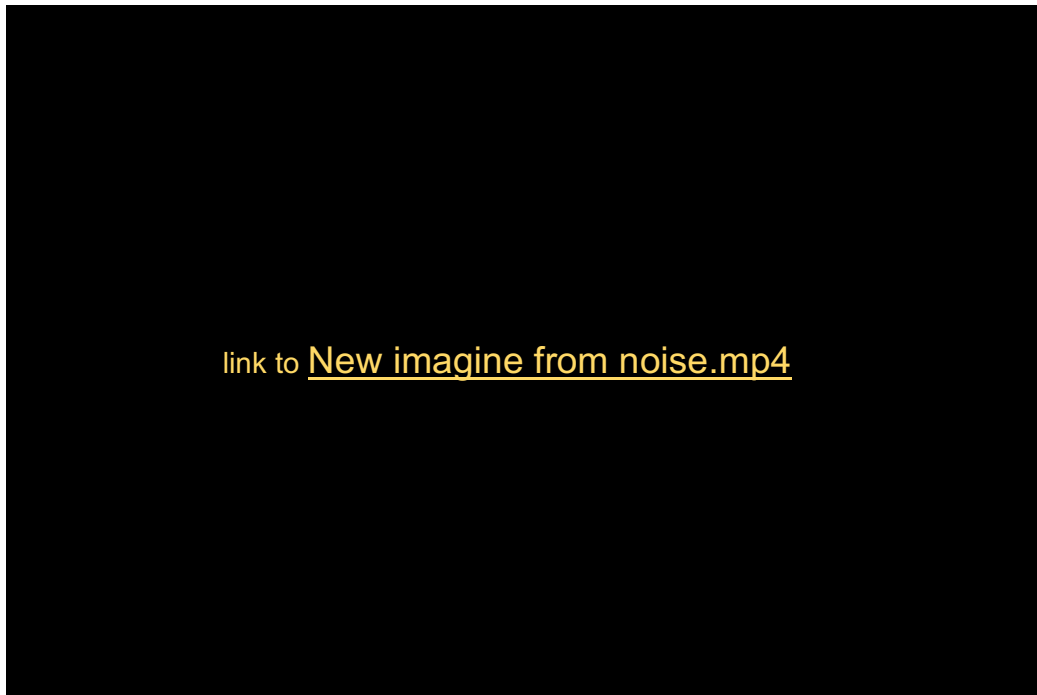
Figure 54. Gego, "Aplique de Reticulárea," 1969.

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<sup>3</sup> Gego, *Questioning the Line: Gego in Context*, ed. Mari Carmen Ramirez (Houston: University of Texas Press, 2003).

Various material explorations into infinite possibilities of focusing on the utilization of “discarded things” evolved into looking towards non-materials, as in the immaterial manifestations of the very sounds that a building makes!

I could detect three different tones of sound from the noise that surrounded me in the Fine Arts Building. For the piece *New Imagine from Noise* (2020), I attempted to change the noise I felt was disturbing me into a form of white noise, by matching each tone with a different series of images, images that I imagined when I heard each tone separately.



*Figure 55. New imagine from noise, sound & video work, 2020*

# Research

## Junk Art

Since the 1960's, the employment of trash and found materials and the idiom of assemblage have been particularly prevalent in global contemporary art practice<sup>4</sup>. When it comes to the beginning of "Junk Art" in which people would make their work out of trash, they also refer to "Duchamp's Ready-Mades." Although Duchamp's Ready-Mades created the opportunity to create an unprecedented amount of work from the by-products in art, it also opened up the possibility that by-products could become the art itself. An anthropological analysis of art has to proceed on the basis that, in relevant theoretical respects, art objects are the equivalent of persons, or more precisely, social agents.<sup>5</sup> This means that works of art reflect the people and society of their time. Given this, I cannot help but see the inherent possibility that a form of art reflecting this age may be the future evolution of "re-use art."

Jean Shin is an installation artist who makes works out of various discarded materials. To make her monumental installations she transforms everyday objects, which are often sourced through donations from individuals in a participating community. This enables the installations to reflect individuals' personal lives as well as the collective issue that we face as a society.

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<sup>4</sup> Gillian Whiteley, 'Junk' art and the politics of trash, p.9

<sup>5</sup> Gell 'Art and Agency' 7p. 1.3. Art sociology





*Figure 56. Jean Shin, Lost and Found (single socks), 2020*

Society so far has focused on maximizing economic profits along with advancing technology. Unlike past systems that used to reuse all materials, the focus is now on producing maximum results in a convenient, easy, and limited time rather than on maximizing the use of resources. As a result, resources are running out, and the environment is being destroyed. I think the main reason artists are recognized in this society is because of their creativity. Duchamp's work on ready-mades has made it possible not only to think that an artist does not have to make their own work, but also that they can use any material they wish, to make their art. This social structure, a system built upon the development of science and technology, has enriched the world with more materials than ever before, and has focused artists' attention on finding new materials for use in their own expression. This is done at a cost, when rather than looking closely at the origins of these materials they instead focus on what the material means for them. Unless it was morally wrong, the artist's freedom for creation was expanded, and guaranteed to continue to expand exponentially into the future. The idea that being an artist is being someone who is recognized in this society by our unrestricted choice of materials and by pursuing works of art for our own self-

satisfaction is shameful to me as a person who made art. So, I considered at length as to how and why I took for granted that the byproducts of creating new images would create even more “waste,” and decided to use only that which has been discarded, as the materials for my work. As there is a growing movement to realize the importance of the environment and to seek a beneficial direction for all living things in the animal, mineral & vegetable world, I have come to believe that the movement has begun to spread, and should be further spread in service to art as well. I’ve concluded that showing more people how discarded materials can be reused for artist creativity can help change the perception of all discarded things!

In Yuken Teruya’s *Notice-Forest* (2012) series, one representative work is a delicately carved tree on the inside of paper shopping bags, which shows how an artist can transform things that are insignificant.



Figure 57. Yuken Teruya, *Notice-Forest*, 2012

## New Materialism

In addition to theories around ready-mades, I am particularly interested in New Materialism. Developed by Karen Barad, Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Grosz, Jane Bennett, Vicki Kirby, and Manuel DeLanda in the late 20th Century, New Materialism is defined around the primacy of matter, and its innate and intrinsic properties. It responds to the need for novel accounts of its agency, nature and the social relationships at play in the contemporary epoch. Now new questions have arisen about our place as “embodied-humans-in-the-world” and the ways that we produce, reproduce and consume our material environment.<sup>6</sup>

I think that the New Materialism can offer opportunities for expanded interpretations of materials and objects, and their relationships with all that surrounds them. We can move away from a human-centric ontology. In the book *Vibrant Matter*, based on the New Materialism, Jane Bennett argues that everything is alive, interconnected and in progress!

“My ‘own’ body is a material, and yet this vital materiality is not fully or exclusively human. My flesh is populated and constituted with multiple swarms of “foreigners” the bacteria in the human microbiome collectively possess at least 100 times as many genes as the mere 20,000 or so in the human genome... we are, rather, an array of bodies, many different kinds of them in a nested set of microbiomes. If more people acknowledged this fact more of the time, if we were more attentive to the indispensable foreignness of who we are composed, would we then continue to produce and consume in the same violently reckless ways that we do?”<sup>7</sup>

I think her explanation is along the same lines as my thinking, and that is, it raises questions about reckless human consumption, which is rooted in the distinction between the human and the non-human.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://newmaterialismincontemporaryart.wordpress.com/about/>

<sup>7</sup> Jane Bennett *‘Vibrant Matter’*, Duke University Press, 2010



# Materials and Methods

## Material choice

There was a book I had read in middle school about a nun, and I remember being greatly impressed by the story. Nothing that was delivered to the nun was ever thrown into the trash, but was always put to other uses. Since then, when I threw something away, I always remembered the nun's story. I have stopped throwing things away without always thinking of a new way to use them. There was often too much trash around and I didn't have enough time to spare for all of that garbage. Such experiences have enabled me to see how creative thinking and patience requires finding new uses for objects so that I can transform them into other forms. I used to compare myself with that nun, who used only limited materials, and as a person using my creativity, I often felt that I fell short to the nun.

Before coming to graduate school, I had been using only one material - glass - for ten years. As interest in materials was an important factor in making my work, I had never thought about the meaning of the material, then I realized that I was working with real specificity, and I began to wonder what it actually meant to me. My concern had been that the work be a reconstituting of industrial by-products. The most satisfying experience from the realizing these works was that they were made of reused materials. Then I began to wonder what the artist's social responsibility might be.

Everything that exists in the world is made from "nature." I think by seeing a living life divided into that which is living and that which is not is a warped human standard. We all share a part of each other, and I believe that's why we're in reality one being. Humans who initially coexisted with nature began to distinguish themselves from what is human and what is not. Human selfishness looked at things other than humans as objects for their exploitation. We are currently facing a

major crisis due to the covid-19 Pandemic that has paralyzed systems all over the world. Covid-19 is thought to be a virus that was transmitted from bats to humans, but I think the fundamental reason for this outbreak is the unilateral exploitation of nature that humans as a whole, have taken up. I think it's because of the unconsidered abuse by people of their surroundings that convenience is now seen as the top priority. Everything can be exploited in some way, and this has led to the destruction of the natural order of things. These crises will come more frequently and more powerfully if we don't solve the fundamental problem of changing the attitude we have towards nature. As an artist one way to work is to view discarded materials as living things, and to use this strategy to reflect on the reckless attitude manifested by reckless human consumption. By blurring the boundaries between human and non-human or living and non-living, I am working to challenge the basic pretexts of 21<sup>st</sup> century civilization.

## **Personalized Technique**

When I am working with glass, I am mainly working with the process of devitrification, a process which crystallizes the surface, and turns the normally clear glass opaque. Through the devitrification process, I was able see glass in a new light. I had initially thought of the glass as an inert substance, not as a living organic matter, like trees, soil, and grass, but only as a chemically bonded molecule. Now through my new explorations it became obvious that a characteristic of Glass was that it could lose its transparency when manipulated in just the right way. Normally in the field of glass there is the consideration that its transparency is its primary feature. The opacification has generally been treated as a phenomenon to be avoided at all costs. In my research I analyzed kiln programming systems to find settings that can control the devitrification process. After working through hundreds of trials and errors, I was able to design my own new creative technique. My experimentation with inducing intentional devitrification

brought a new way of perceiving the material. At the beginning my work using the devitrification process was aimed at using glass that had been discarded as waste from traditional stained-glass fabrication. I often employed glass that had been exposed to the outside for many years and had developed corrupted and contaminated surfaces.

I continued my research using other glasses, including the glass left over from a window glass installation company and the glass bottles from daily life. The image in our heads of the material Glass is formed by people choosing just some of its properties and ignoring the many others. My work shows a new aspect of Glass, one which was not explored because perhaps, it did not meet the needs of the mainstream.



*Figure 58. A part of **Self-portrait as a 껌질 (kkeobjil)**, glass bottle, 2020*

Shari Mendelson who works to find other possibilities from discarded plastic, makes works that look like glass from the ancient world. She is concerned that discarded materials pose a perpetual threat to our ecological systems, and wants them to be seen as valuable materials. I believe that she's thinking similarly to what I am, and that is what can we do in this society "as an artist." When talking about her practice, she states: "I'm following in a long

tradition of artists and makers by using a modern material that is abundant in our culture to emulate a more valuable or rare material.”<sup>8</sup> Through this all she emphasizes the glass-like features that are found in plastics, and she uses its physical properties, ones that are easier to transform than glass, to her advantage, Plastic is transformed into a copy of an ancient glass object, that is then considered more valuable through her masterly interventions. I think that the arbitrary distinctions that are made between which materials are worth more than others, is a fundamental flaw in the “modern constructed capitalist ecosystem,” one that stands as a threat to the natural ecosystem that surrounds us. Until now, people have taken for granted what is considered to be “more valuable” and what is not valued, by employing the very short-sighted vision of economic standards, many that are not based on any deep consideration of what our impact on the natural world is. I think that my works in glass are taking a more fundamentally direct approach to the method of reusing discarded materials, by presenting the myriad characteristics of glass itself, showcased through the application of the devitrification process.



*Figure 59. Shari Mendelson  
Deer Askos, Repurposed plastic, hot  
glue, resin, acrylic polymer, paint,  
mica, 8x7x3, 2018*

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.romanovgrave.com/one-question-one-answer/shari-mendelson>

Many products are “reshaped” by the immediate needs of contemporary consumer culture. They are used for a very limited amount of time, and then dumped into the “trash.” The things that are thrown into the garbage are not discarded because the value of the thing is gone, but because we cannot find any other uses for it. Every time I made a piece out of discarded things, I wanted to be able to find and showcase the intrinsic characteristics of the natural materials, materials that we hadn't seen before. The reason why I work to transform the materials to the point where they are no longer easy to identify, is to highlight the appearances of materials in nature, rather than “products” made by human needs. I hope that we can change our attitudes of so easily abandoning things, by pointing to their innate vitality.

## Expression

For my MFA Exhibition I planned to create landscape imagery and focus on the spaces themselves in the gallery setting, as a way to show the harmony between the human-built-world and the natural one. I was working at creating a landscape that combined dust, with spider webs and paint marks. These would be applied directly onto the interior windows and would showcase imagery typical of the glass that we would generally associate with those spaces.



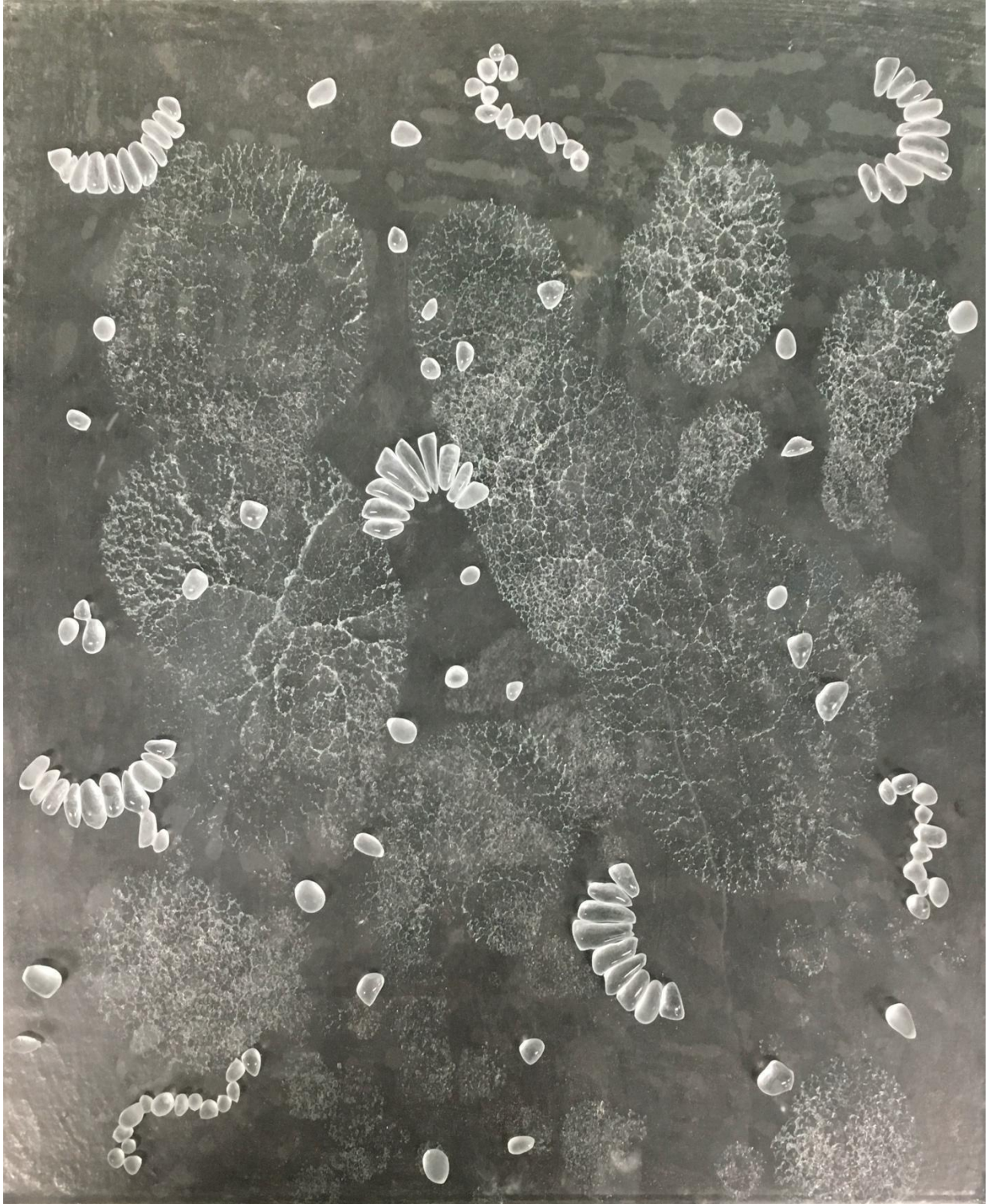
*Figure 60. Picture of a window's detail where the Landscape work will be installed*





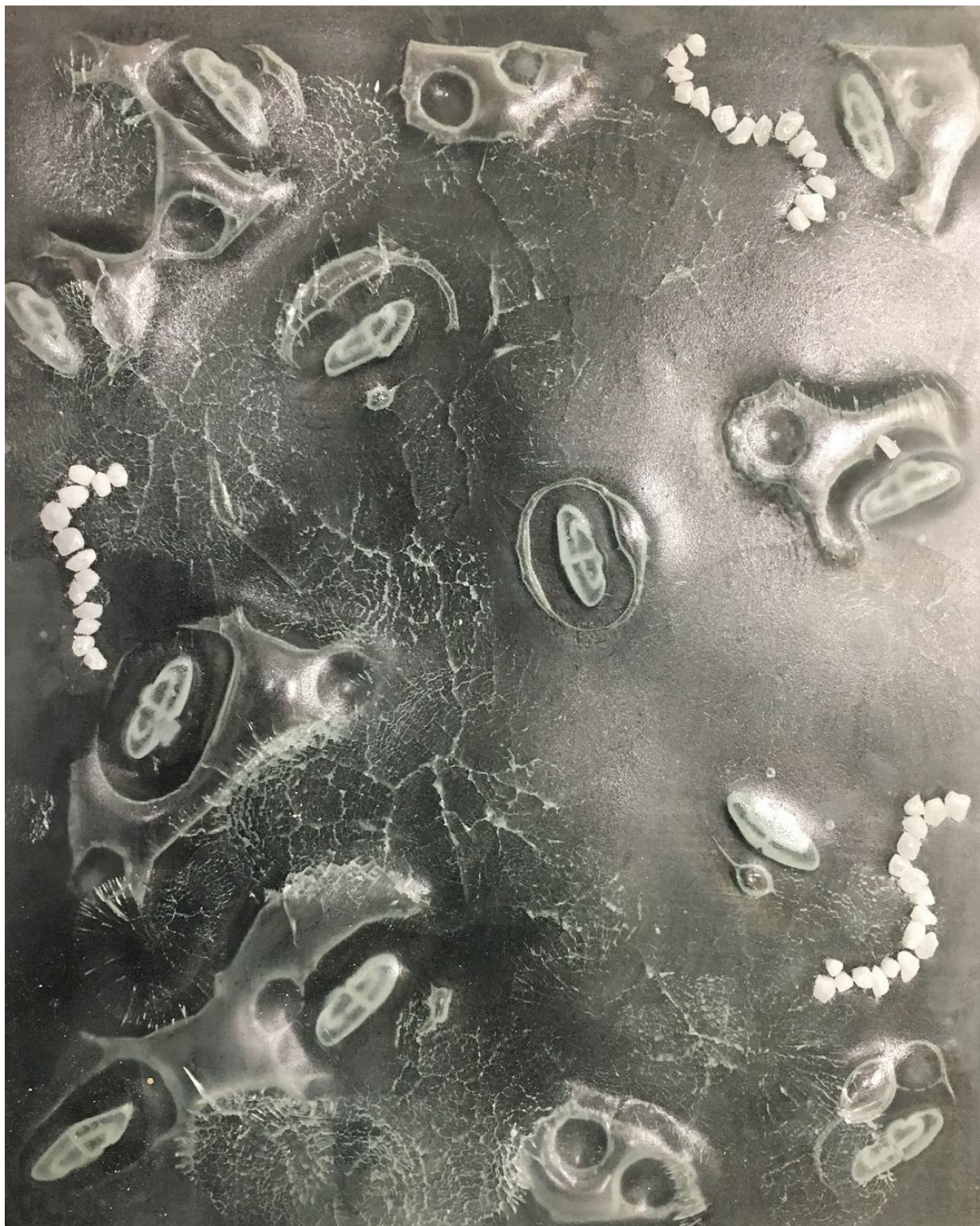
*Figure 61. Picture of a window where the Landscape work will be installed*





*Figure 62. One of the glass pieces image to be installed in the window, h15 x w9.5 x d1/2 inches, window glass, 2020*





*Figure 63. One of the glass pieces image to be installed in the window, h15 x w9.5 x d1/2 inches, window glass, 2020*



For **Self-portrait as a 껌질 (kkeobjil)**, I don't think the variety of my ideas nor the emotional content that are specifically intrinsic to me, are completely fixed in place. Rather I sense that they can come in and out of each of us, like the air itself. I think the existence of oneself can be likened to the formation of a passageway, a passageway with many perforations along its sides, these can either impede one's transit or facilitate one's ability to just pass-through.

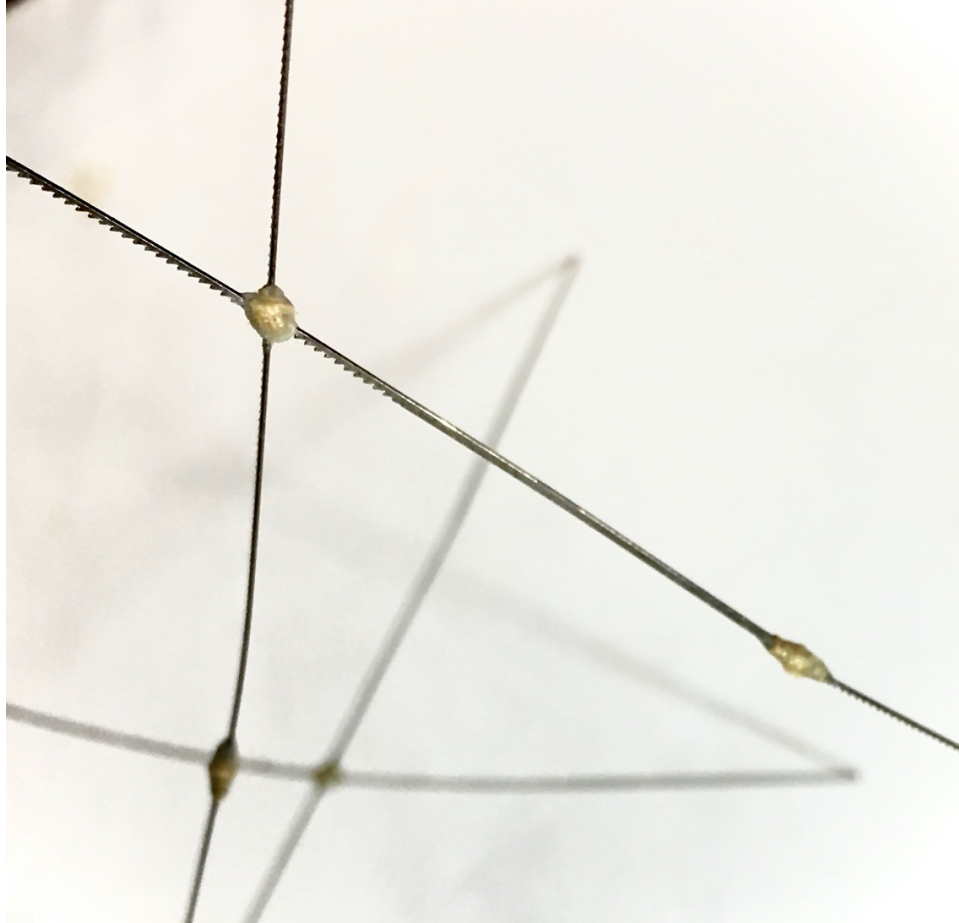


Figure 64. A part of **Self-portrait as a 껌질 (kkeobjil)**, glass bottle, 2020

For the piece **Nerves**, a broken metal saw blade was connected to a thread to make it look like microscopic nerves are spreading into space. I felt that the metal saw blades tiny bumps could convey the sharp sensation of nerve endings. In this work the gum covers the colored threads, and works as a membrane so thin that it is nearly invisible to the naked eye.



*Figure 65. Nerves, Installation work, broken metal saw blade, chewing gum, thread, 2020*



*Figure 66. Detail image of Nerves, Installation work, broken metal saw blade, chewing gum, thread, 2020*

To install the work, I printed fine lines onto this recycled matrix material, utilizing traditional printmaking processes. The process of printmaking is as time consuming as the methodology I employed in grinding the discarded paper towels back into a single sheet. I thought that there would be an analogous relationship between processes, and that perhaps my inclusion of process-information could allude indirectly to the long journey that a material that was thrown away had taken.





*Figure 67. Progress image of installation work, 2020*

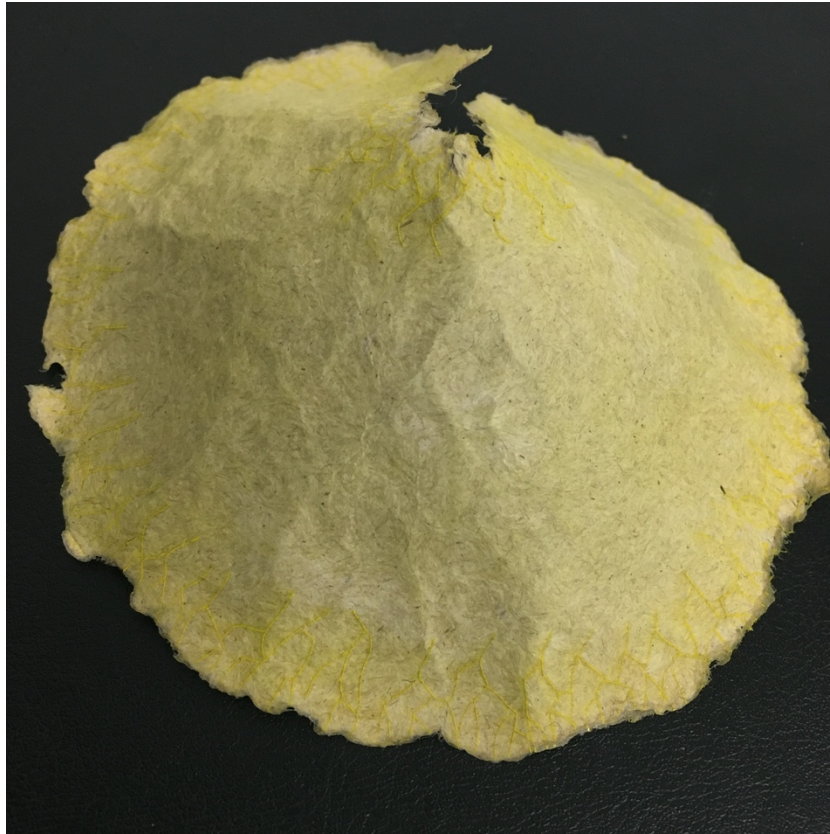
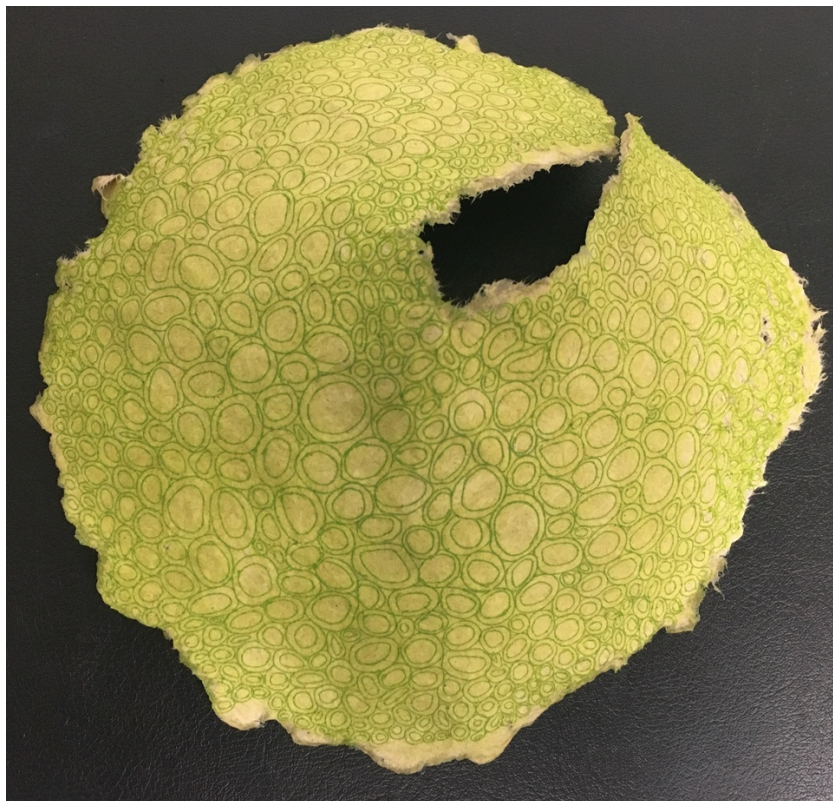


Figure 68, 35. *A part of installation work, h2 x w3.9 x d3.9 inches, paper towel, printmaking 2020*



## **New discoveries and Limitations**

From the singular abhorrent observation that trash is continuously created by this society, a society that judges things through the myopic and simplistic lens of what is a necessity and what is readily expendable, I have come to realize that the world we live in is still one driven by human choices. It has occurred to me that my making of art works out of discarded materials was a way of imagining other choices and other possibilities, ones where within there can be a re-imagining of the possibilities.

I feel that the creating of new forms is alone not a strong enough methodology in application to give voice to the altering of materials, in that the materials already have strong roots in their origins, roots that give it an inherent agency, and a “life” of its own. I have been working with various materials to try a diverse range of interventions, but now I think that I ought to narrow the scope of my materials a bit more, and make even more in-depth observations, and take a deep dive into research on the very specific materials I plan to engage with next.

## **Reflection**

Employing the processes that I do in my work, perhaps can shed a bit of light on what is an essential self. I began my graduate studies attempting to find ways to positively influence this culture that fosters abuse of the natural world. I have tried to create a place and time to focus on the cause of the environmental problems facing us. The present era in human-centered thinking must become aware anew of nature’s value. By repurposing abandoned materials, and treating



them as living things, I have tried to redefine the relationships that people have had with what they categorize as the “raw materials around them.” Working within the concept of the new materialism, I would like to explore work that can work to redefine the relationship between matter and non-matter. This can allow me to think of my very existence as that of being in a non-material state, rather than as a state of matter.

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# Vita

## EDUCATION

- 2020 MFA Craft/Material Studies, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA, U.S.A
- 2006 BA Korean Language/Literature, BFA Photography, Sangmyung University, South Korea

## ADDITIONAL EDUCATION

- 2012 Advanced Research Studies Program, Toyama City Institute Of Glass Art, Toyama, Japan
- 2010 Glass Certification Studies Program, Toyama City Institute Of Glass Art, Toyama, Japan

## EXPERIENCE

- 2020 Instructor, Project class for glass, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA, U.S.A
- 2019 Teaching Assistant to Bo-Hyun Yoon, Introduction to Glass Fabrication, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA, U.S.A
- 2018 Teaching Assistant to Bo-Hyun Yoon, Intermediate Glass Fabrication/Hot, Virginia Commonwealth. University, Richmond, VA, U.S.A

## AWARDS, SCHOLARSHIP

- 2019 The 1<sup>st</sup> Our Artist of SuperBin Grant, SuperBin, South Korea  
Pilchuck Glass School, half scholarship Carmem Montoya & Anjali Srinivasan's Glass as Social Practice: Environmentalism course, Stanwood, WA, U.S.A
- 2015 Silver Prize, 9<sup>th</sup> Cheongju International Biennale, Cheongju, Korea

Prize of The chief director , 71<sup>th</sup> Kanazawa Craft Competition, M'za, Kanazawa, Japan

Honor researcher, Form of Utatsuyama, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum, Kanazawa, Japan

2014 2nd Prize, 70<sup>th</sup> Kanazawa Craft Competition, M'za, Kanazawa, Japan

2013 1st Prize, The International Exhibition of Glass Kanazawa, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum, Kanazawa, Japan

1st Prize, 69<sup>th</sup> Kanazawa Craft Competition, M'za, Kanazawa, Japan

Special Prize, Competition of World Craft in Kanazawa, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum, Kanazawa, Japan

Specilal Selection, 8<sup>th</sup> Cheongju International Biennale, Cheonju, Korea

Honor researcher, The Exhibition of Utatsuyama Craft Workshop Researcher, 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Museum, Kanazawa, Japan

2012 – 2015 Researcher, Full scholarship, concentration in Glass, Utatsuyama Craft Workshop, Kanazawa. Japan

2012 1st Prize, 27<sup>th</sup> Contemporary Arts and Craft Isikawa, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum, Kanazawa, Japan

2010 2nd Prize In Structure Part, Eccuhu Art Festival, Toyama, Japan

Honor student, TIGA'S Annual Graduate Thesis Exhibition, Toyama, Japan

## **SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS**

2015 'Glass', Takashimaya(Nihonbasi), Tokyo Japan

'Glass', Toneriko gallery, Kanazawa Japan

2014 'Passageway', Isikawa International Salon, Kanazawa Japan

2013 'Life-Force of Glass', Isikawa International Salon, Kanazawa Japan

## **SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS**

2019 '10<sup>th</sup> Cheongju International Biennale', Cheonju, Korea (catalog)

2015 '9<sup>th</sup> Cheongju International Biennale', Cheonju, Korea (catalog)

'COLOURS' curated Susanne Joker Johnsen , Hempel Glasmuseum, Denmark

- '6<sup>th</sup> Contemporary Glass in Sanyo Onoda', Onoda Sun Park, Sanyo Onoda, Japan
- '71<sup>th</sup> Kanazawa Craft Competition', M'za, Kanazawa, Japan
- 2014      '70<sup>th</sup> Kanazawa Craft Competition', M'za, Kanazawa, Japan (catalog)
- 'Agnès Loves Japan', Isetan(shinjuku), Tokyo, Japan (catalog)
- 'Cool tea-things', Sibuya Hikarie, Tokyo, Japan
- 2013      'The International Exhibition of Glass Kanazawa', Notojima Glass Art Museum, Notojima, Japan (catalog)
- 'Competition of World Craft in Kanazawa', 21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum, Kanazawa, Japan
- 'The International Exhibition of Glass Kanazawa', Shiinoki Cultural Complex, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum, Kanazawa, Japan (catalog)
- '8<sup>th</sup> Cheongju International Biennale', Cheonju, Korea (catalog)
- '69<sup>th</sup> Kanazawa Craft Competition', M'za, Kanazawa, Japan
- 2012      '5<sup>th</sup> Contemporary Glass in Sanyo Onoda', Onoda Sun Park, Sanyo Onoda, Japan
- '27<sup>th</sup> Contemporary Arts and Craft Isikawa', 21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum, Kanazawa, Japan
- '5<sup>th</sup> Form of Vessel', Koganezaki Glass Museum, Shizuoka, Japan (catalog)
- 2011      '4<sup>th</sup> Contemporary Glass Triennial in Toyama', Shimin Plaza Art Gallery, Toyama, Japan
- 2010      'Eccuhu Art Festival', Toyama Kenminkaikan Museum of Art, Toyama, Japan
- 'The International Exhibition of Glass Kanazawa', Notojima Glass Art Museum, Notojima, Japan
- 'The International Exhibition of Glass Kanazawa', Diwa, Kanazawa, Japan

## **COLLECTIONS – PUBLIC, PRIVATE**

- 2018      Notojima Glass Art Museum, Notojima, Japan
- 2015      Cheongju International Biennale Committee, Cheonju, Korea
- Utatsuyama Craft Workshop, Kanazawa, Japan.

- 2014 Toyama Glass Art Museum, Toyama, Japan
- 2010 Toyama City Institute of Glass Art, Toyama, Japan

## **PUBLICATIONS**

- 2014 'The Window of Arts', Feb. 2014, p.127, Seikatsu no Tomo, Japan
- 2013 'Neues Glas-New Glass', winter, 2013, p.8 ~p.15, Neues Glas magazine, Germany
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- 2012 Hokoku Newspaper, Japan, June 12, 2012